Good afternoon parents and caregivers:

Next Thursday, November 11, I will be recommending to our Board of Education that it adjust the 2021-22 academic calendar to reflect Monday, November 22, and Tuesday, November 23 as no school days. This would extend the Thanksgiving break to the full week of Nov. 22-26. This is not an easy recommendation for me as it adds yet another change in our routines. I have struggled with it, but feel it is necessary.

Responding to COVID-19 has caused us to reevaluate the entire public school educational ecosystem. Last year, we pivoted to virtual instruction, returned to a hybrid model, and then to four-days-a-week of in-person instruction for most of our schools. This year, even with staff and 94% of students back in school five days a week, the ecosystem has proven even more challenging.

Some of our students were out of school for 17 months. Take that in for a moment: nearly a year and a half away from in-person instruction and the many relationships and resources to humanize, personalize and problematize their learning and social emotional well being. As we settled into the new normal this school year, we knew it was going to be challenging. But we honestly underestimated the profound impact of the last 17 months, particularly for our younger scholars. Our students continue to be amazing, And, yes, they continue to have a tremendous amount of social-emotional and academic needs.

These challenges also apply to our staff. Staff continue to support our students and their families while also navigating their own struggles related to COVID-19. They, too, need extra time and resources to maintain their well-being that is crucial for themselves and for effectively educating our students.
At the start of this year, we pledged to strive for a safe, healthy, flourishing and connected U. City Schools community. These two extra days off are in keeping with that pledge. I make this decision while also understanding the additional weight and stress it may create for some of our families. But if our staff are not well, we can’t expect our children to be well.

This action also aligns with other neighboring districts, as well as our commitment to well-being and joy. While this may not be a popular decision, I believe that it is a necessary one, and I thank you for your understanding.

COVID-19 Vaccine Clinics for youth
This week, the CDC approved pediatric doses of the Pfizer vaccine for children 5 through 11. We will be hosting our first vaccine clinic that includes this new age group on Tuesday, Nov. 16 from 3:30 to 7 p.m. in the Jackson Park Elementary School gym. This new pediatric vaccine is a two-dose vaccine. The second dose will be available during another clinic to be scheduled in early December. A pre-registration link for the Nov. 16 event will be shared next week with elementary and 6th grade parents and caregivers. There is also a COVID-19 vaccine clinic this Wednesday, Nov. 10, from 3 to 7 p.m. at the McNair Administration Building for individuals 12 and over in need of adult first, second or booster doses of Pfizer or Johnson & Johnson vaccines.

COVID-19 vaccination for youth talk on Wednesday
If you do have questions or need more information about the pediatric COVID-19 vaccine, join us in-person this Wednesday, Nov. 10 for a talk with Ericka Hayes, M.D. Dr. Hayes is an African American associate professor of pediatrics and infectious disease at Washington University School of Medicine. We are hosting her as part of our pledge to present scientific and research-based information about the virus and effective ways to prevent its transmission. Register to attend at www.ucityschools.org/TownHall111021. The event will be videotaped and posted on the District’s website.

Sign up for STEAM Expo Zoom sessions
This year’s all-district STEAM Expo will be held virtually from 6 to 7:30 p.m. on Nov. 16. Sign up now to attend your choice of 15-minute presentations. Topics include coding, rocketry, scientific drawing, gaming design, neuroscience and more! You can learn more about the event at www.ucityschools.org/STEAMExpo2021.

Exceptional UCHS athletics news
The Girls Varsity Field Hockey Team and their Coach Marisa Sheppard have been awarded the prestigious 2021 Mike Winkelmann Spirit of the Game Award for sportsmanship, respect and genuine love of the game. The St. Louis Field Hockey Association award was presented to the team last weekend. I am incredibly proud of them as this represents the best outcome of Learning Reimagined on the playing field!
There’s more news in Cross Country; Last weekend, Juniors Elias Klein and Julien Trobaugh qualified for the Class 4 State Cross Country Championships that were held this morning in Colombia, MO. Today, Julien placed 64th with a time of 17:05 and Elias placed 48th with a time of 16:52.7 in the Class 4, 5K race. Each set a personal record and UCHS records. This is truly a testament to their athleticism and grit. Congratulations to the entire team!

Finally, Varsity Football is playing tonight at 7 p.m. in the Class 4, District 3 Semifinals against Parkway North at Parkway North High School. Tickets are $5. Live Stream is available through MSHSAA TV for $10: https://vcloud.blueframetech.com/broadcast/ppv/318103. Go Lions!

Key dates

- **November 10, COVID-19 Vaccines and Children Discussion** with Washington University School of Medicine Associate Professor of Pediatrics and Infectious Disease Ericka Hayes, M.D., 5:30 p.m. at the McNair Administration Building. Register at www.ucityschools.org/TownHall111021.

- **November 10, 2021, COVID-19 Vaccination Clinic for ages 12 and older**, 3 to 7 p.m. McNair Administration Building, 7700 Olive Boulevard. Pre-register here.


- **November 16, COVID-19 Vaccination Clinic for ages 5 and up**, 3:30 to 7:30 p.m., Jackson Park Elementary School. Pre-registration link will be shared next week.

- **November 16, districtwide STEAM Expo**, 6 to 7:30 p.m. Event will be virtual. Learn more at www.ucityschools.org/STEAMExpo2021. Register to attend.

- **November 22-23, Pending school board approval, no school.**

- **November 24-26, District closed, Thanksgiving Break.**

- **December 7, State of the District annual presentation.**
  - 5 - 6 p.m. virtual webinar via Zoom
  - 6:30 - 7:30 p.m. in-person with a light dinner and limited seating in the University City High School library, 7401 Balson Ave. (63130)

As a reminder, be sure to “fall back” for Daylight Saving Time. Clocks should be adjusted one hour backwards at 2 a.m. Sunday morning, November 7.

Finally, I want to thank the Jackson Park PTO, One U. City, and dozens of volunteers for a truly joyful day of fall activities this past Saturday. The pumpkin carving tables were busy all afternoon. The Trunk or Treat hosts did a phenomenal job decorating their cars and entertaining our families.
The pumpkin stroll was pretty and cheerful with more than 100 student, family and staff decorated pumpkins lining the stadium track. The day was a true bright spot indicative of our amazing community.

As always, I can be reached with questions or concerns at shardin@ucityschools.org on my cell phone at 314-399-0941.

In Service of Our Children,

Sharonica Hardin-Bartley, Ph.D., PHR

Superintendent